

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 14526 01 OF 02 230605Z
ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10
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R 230522Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
USMISSION GENEVA
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 14526

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TAGS: SREF TH LA
SUBJECT: RTG REFUGEE POLICY IN CHIANG RAI PROVINCE

FOL MSG RECD ACTION BANGKOK DATED 220732Z MAY 78 AND BEING REPEATED
FOR YOUR INFO:

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE CHIANG MAI 196 SECTION 1 OF 2

E.O.11652: N/A
TAGS: SREF, TH, LA
SUBJECT: RTG REFUGEE POLICY IN CHIANG RAI PROVINCE

REF: CHIANG MAI 139

SUMMARY: DESPITE REPORTS BY CHIANG RAI PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS
THAT THE REFUGEES THAT WERE HELD IN THE TEMPORARY CENTER AT
MAE CHAN HAD BEEN REPATRIATED BACK TO LAOS, OTHER RELIABLE
SOURCES TELL US THAT NONE OF THOSE REFUGEES WERE SENT BACK.
INSTEAD THEY WERE MOVED BY MILITARY AUTHORITIES TO A REMOTE
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PAGE 02 BANGKO 14526 01 OF 02 230605Z

AREA IN CHIANG SAEN DISTRICT. WE ARE NOT SURE WHY PROVINCIAL
OFFICIALS ARE LYING TO US, BUT SUSPECT IT IS BECAUSE OF THEIR
INVOLVEMENT IN CORRUPT PRACTISES DEALING WITH NEWLY ARRIVED
REFUGEES. END SUMMARY.

1. I, A CONSULATE FSL, AND MR. SAGE FROM THE EMBASSY REFUGEE
OFFICE SPENT LAST WEDNESDAY AND THURSDAY LOOKING INTO THE QUESTION

OF WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENING TO RECENTLY ARRIVED REFUGEES IN CHIANG RAI PROVINCE AND WHETHER OR NOT THE REFUGEES IN THE TEMPORARY CAMP AT MAE CHAN WERE REPATRIATED BACK TO LAOS.

2. WE TALKED WITH PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS IN THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE AT CHIANG RAI AT SOME LENGTH. THEY CONTINUED TO INSIST THAT THE REFUGEES PREVIOUSLY HELD AT THE MAE CHAN TEMPORARY CAMP HAD BEEN REPATRIATED BACK TO LAOS. THEY CLAIMED THAT IN CARRYING OUT THE REPATRIATION THEY HAD ONLY BEEN FOLLOWING OFFICIAL ORDERS FROM THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR. IN FACT, THEY SAID THEY HAD BEEN SLOW IN FOLLOWING THOSE ORDERS AS THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO HAVE HELD SUCH REFUGEE IN THE NEW CAMP AT MAE CHAN FOR ONLY ONE MONTH BEFORE MAKING A FINAL DISPOSITION OF THE CASE. INSTEAD THEY HAD KEPT THE REFUGEES THERE FOR ALMOST FOUR MONTHS, AND THE OFFICIALS COMPLAINED THEY WERE NOW CONCERNED ABOUT HOW THE PROVINCE WOULD MEET THE BILLS FOR FOOD PROVIDED TO THE REFUGEES AS THERE WAS NOTHING IN THE MOI BUDGET TO COVER EXPENSES FOR SUCH A LONG PERIOD OF TIME.

3. WE MENTIONED THAT WE KNEW THAT TWO OF THE REFUGEES AT MAE CHAN WITH IMMEDIATE FAMILY IN THE UNITED STATES HAD BEEN SENT TO THE UNHCR SPONSORED CAMP AT CHIANG KHONG. WE ASKED ABOUT THE FATE OF TWO OTHER PEOPLE WHO WE KNEW HAD CLOSE RELATIVES IN THE UNITED STATES AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 BANGKO 14526 01 OF 02 230605Z

EXPRESSED CONSIDERABLE CONCERN THAT PEOPLE WHO MIGHT HAVE HAVE BEEN ELIGIBLE FOR PAROLE INTO THE UNITED STATES HAD BEEN SENT BACK TO LAOS. WE ALSO ASKED WHY THE EIGHT PEOPLE APPROVED TO GO TO FRANCE HAD BEEN SENT BACK, APPARENTLY IN DIRECT OPPOSITION TO GOVERNMENT POLICY. THE PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS CLAIMED TO HAVE BEEN UNAWARE THAT OTHERS MIGHT HAVE QUALIFIED FOR THE US PROGRAM, AND THEY ALSO CLAIMED THAT THE APPROVAL FOR THE EIGHT PEOPLE GOING TO FRANCE HAD ARRIVED IN THE PROVINCE THE DAY AFTER THE REPATRIATION HAD TAKEN PLACE.

4. NOTING THAT WE MIGHT BE ASKED BY FAMILY IN THE UNITED STATES ABOUT THE FATE OF THEIR RELATIVES, WE TRIED TO GET MORE INFORMATION ON EXACTLY WHEN THE REFUGEES HAD BEEN REPATRIATED, WHERE THEY CROSSED THE BORDER, AND WHERE THEY MIGHT BE NOW. THROUGHOUT THE INTERVIEW, ALL THE PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS APPEARED INCREASINGLY NERVOUS, OFTEN COUNTERDICTED PREVIOUS STATEMENTS THEY HAD MADE, AND FINALLY REFUSED TO ANSWER ANY FURTHER QUESTIONS, CLAIMING THE ANSWERS WERE "GOVERNMENT SECRETS" WHICH THEY COULD NOT DISCUSS.

5. WE THEN DROVE OUT TO THE SCHOOL IN MAE CHAN THAT HAD BEEN USED AS A TEMPORARY CENTER AND CONFIRMED THAT ALL THE REFUGEES HAD LEFT. THE SCHOOL WAS OPEN AND CLASSES WERE BEING HELD. THE TEACHER TOLD US SCHOOL HAD STARTED ON MAY 1. (THE NEED TO START USING THE SCHOOL FOR ITS INTENDED PURPOSE MAY HAVE BEEN THE REASON WHY PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS SUDDENLY DECIDED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THE REFUGEES BEING HELD THERE.)

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 14526 02 OF 02 230627Z
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 14526

6. THE NEXT DAY MR. SAGE AD THE CONSULATE FSL DROVE TO THE CHIANG KHONG CAMP WHERE SAGE TALKED WITH RELIABLE SOURCES INSIDE THE CAMP. THOSE SOURCES COMPLETELY COUNTERDICTED THE STORY TOLD BY THE CHIANG RAI PROVINCIAL OFFICERS. THE CAMP SOURCES REPORTED THAT THE REFUGEES HELD AT MAE CHAN HAD NOT BEEN SENT BACK TO LAOS. INSTEAD, THEY HAD ALL BEEN MOVED TO BAN MAE AEP, A REMOTE HILL TRIBE AREA IN CHIANG SAEN DISTRICT BETWEEN CHIANG SAEN AND CHIANG KHONG. ONE OF THE PEOPLE THAT SAGE TALKED TO WAS ONE OF THE REFUGEES THAT HAD BEEN HELD AT MAE CHAN AND HAD MOVED WITH THE ENTIRE GROUP TO BAN MAE AEP. (THIS SOURCE WAS IN THE CHIANG KHONG CAMP FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT.)

7. SAGE ALSO LEARNED THAT THE FAMILY OF EIGHT THAT HAD BEEN CLEARED TO GO TO FRANCE HAD SHOWN UP AT THE CHIANG KHONG CAMP ON MAY 16, AND DEPARTED IN AN MOI BUS FOR THE SAM PLU TRANSIT CENTER ON MAY 17.

8. SAGE'S SOURCES BELIEVE THAT THOSE PEOPLE WHO WERE
AT MAE CHAN AND WHO MAY QUALIFY UNDER THE US OR OTHER
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PAGE 02 BANGKO 14526 02 OF 02 230627Z

PROGRAMS WILL EVENTUALLY SHOW UP IN THE CAMP AT CHIANG
KHONG. (IF THEY DO NOT SHOW UP, IT IS NOW OBVIOUS,
GIVEN THE UNWILLINGNESS OF CHIANG RAI OFFICIALS TO
COOPERATE WITH US, THAT ANY FURTHER INQUIRIES
ABOUT THEIR WHEREABOUTS WILL HAVE TO BE DIRECTED TO
RELATIVELY HIGH LEVELS IN THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR
IN BANGKOK.

9. THERE ARE REPORTS THAT OTHER RECENTLY
ARRIVED REFUGEES ARE ALSO STAYING IN THE AREA AROUND
BAN MAE AEP, AND THAT SOME 81 YAO WHO CROSSED INTO
THAILAND ON APRIL 25 ARE BEING HELD AT A PLACE CALLED SOP
HUAL IN CHIANG SAEN DISTRICT. ALSO, ONCE
AGAIN, REFUGEES ARE CAMPED OUT IN THE DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS
OFFICE AT CHIANG KHONG. THERE ARE NOW 64 THERE AND THAT
INCLUDES SOME OF THE PEOPLE WHO WERE PREVIOUSLY LIVING
AT THE DISTRICT OFFICE BUT WHO WERE RECENTLY REPORTED TO
HAVE "ESCAPED" INTO THE SURROUNDING HILLS.

10. DESPITE THEIR UNWILLINGNESS TO DISCUSS JUST WHAT IS
HAPPENING, ALL THE PROVINCIAL OFFICERS WITH WHOM WE TALKED
DID KNOW ABOUT RECENT CHANGES IN GOVERNMENT POLICY REGARDING
NEW ARRIVALS. THEY ALL ASSURED US THAT FROM NOW ON, NO
NEW ARRIVALS WOULD BE SENT BACK TO LAOS. ONE LOW LEVEL
DISTRICT OFFICIAL IN CHIANG KHONG TOLD THE CONSULATE
FSL THAT THE REFUGEES PRESENTLY HELD OUTSIDE THE CAMP
WOULD SOON BE MOVED INTO THE UNHCR SPONSORED CAMP. THIS,
HE SAID, WOULD EVEN INCLUDE SUCH PEOPLE AS THE MAO PRESENTLY
LIVING IN THE VILLAGE THEY CONSTRUCTED AT BAN LU IN CHIANG
KHONG DISTRICT.

11. THE EVASIVENESS AND THE OUTRIGHT PREVARICATIONS OF
THE PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS WITH WHOM WE TALKED
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PAGE 03 BANGKO 14526 02 OF 02 230627Z

IS DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND. OBVIOUSLY, THEY ARE TRYING TO
HIDE SOMETHING, BUT WE ARE NOT SURE JUST WHAT. THE MOST
PROBABLE EXPLANATION IS THAT THEY ARE ATTEMPTING TO COVER
UP SOME OF THEIR OWN CORRUPTION IN THEIR DEALINGS WITH
RECENTLY ARRIVED REFUGEES. BOTH MR. SAGE AND OUR FSL
DEVELOPED INFORMATION THAT TENDS TO CONFIRM SUCH A

CONCLUSION. THAT INFORMATION SUGGESTS THAT SOME OFFICIALS
HAVE BEEN CHARGING NEW ARRIVALS FOR THE PRIVILEGE OF
STAYING IN THAILAND. ONE REPORT CLAIMS THAT THE PRICE
HAS BEEN B/ 2,000 PER HEAD, TO BE PAID BY THE REFUGEE
OR BY RELATIVES ALREADY LIVING IN THAILAND.
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